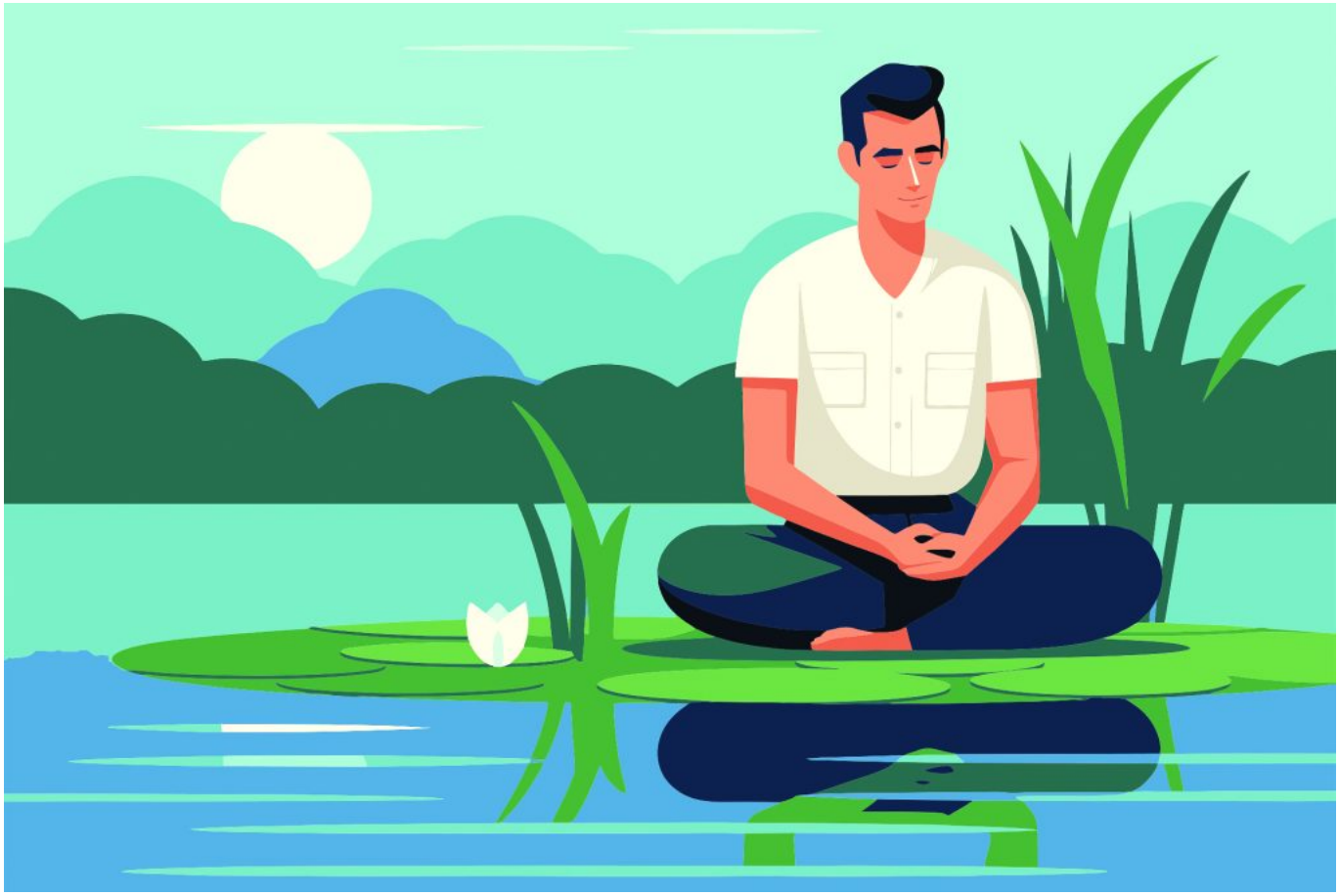
How can we rewire our brains? Part II

Posted on



In the previous article, we delved into the benefits of meditation. Now, we're excited to guide you through the practice of meditation, focusing on Ānāpāna Sati and Vipassanā techniques.

The art of meditation has a rich, ancient history dating back to over 2,500 years ago during Lord Buddha's time. Even prior to that, there were methods for mind training, such as yoga and Prānayāma, devoid of religious associations. In that period, numerous ascetics, including Ālāra Kālāma and Uddhakarāma, achieved elevated mental states through Jhāna or self-realization.

Additionally, Kondañña, Vappa, Bhaddhiya, Mahānāma, and Assaji were among five

ascetics who honed their minds for self-discovery. Notably, Vipassanā meditation was exclusively imparted by Lord Buddha, distinguishing it from other contemporary practices.

Vipassanā is a Pāli word that means “view, observation, special sight, well understanding” according to the Pāli English Dictionary. It is Vidarshanā in Sanskrit.

T. W. Rhys Davids, a well-respected Pāli learned scholar, defines Vipassanā as “inward vision, insight, intuition, introspection.” S.N. Goenkha, a prominent meditation teacher, explains Vipassanā as “a science of mind and matter, understanding how the mind is inclusive in the body, and vice versa.” In his meditation program, he further elaborates that “All happens at the depth of the mind; the conscious mind does not fully comprehend what is happening deep inside. This lack of awareness leads to habitual reactions to sensations, whether pleasant or unpleasant.”

The conscious mind is limited in its ability to fully comprehend the depths of the unconscious due to its constant reactivity to sensations. This continuous response to cravings and aversions occurs without the individual’s awareness. The impurities and defilements of the mind stem from these cravings and aversions. Whenever one experiences craving or aversion, it disrupts the peace, harmony, and balance of the mind, leading to misery.

Practicing techniques like Ānāpānasati alone may not effectively break the habit pattern of the mind, as craving and aversion originate at the root level of the mind and constantly interact with body sensations. The interconnected nature of the mind and matter perpetuates the ongoing cycle of craving and aversion. To truly overcome this, one must delve deep into the mind. In psychology, Sigmund Freud referred to the unconscious mind as the “id” and compared the mind to an iceberg, with a significant portion submerged in the water, representing the unconscious or ego. Additionally, Freud likened the unconscious mind, to a vessel of boiling water, signifying that our irrational thoughts are stored in the unconscious mind.

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Buddhism offers a clear explanation of how we shape our minds from the moment of birth until the moment of death. “Chakkhung paticca rūpē uppajjati chakkuvin. n. ānang,” In Majjhima Nikaya, it is revealed that when we perceive something, our mind immediately recognizes it, processes it, and then utilizes discernment. Subsequently, we tend to develop a craving or aversion towards it, leading to a continuous cycle of thoughts that often result in agitation, frustration, anxiety, and depression. This pattern continues unless we are in a state of sleep. Those unaware of this habitual thought pattern may question themselves and fall victim to false beliefs, ultimately causing harm to their lives due to ignorance of their mind or soul. Buddhism addresses this through the practice of meditation, known as ‘Vipassanā’ in Pāli and ‘Insight Development’ in English, aimed at cultivating the mind. It’s clearly stated in the Satipatthāna Sūtra as “E□kāyanō ayam˙ maggō Bkikkhavē sattānam˙ visudhiyā …” Majjhima Nikāya. “The only way for the purification of beings, the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, the destroying of pain and grief, reaching the right path, and realizing Nibbāna is through the four Foundations of Mindfulness.” (Tranquility and Insight, Amadeo Sole-Leris, Buddhist publication society, Kandy. p. 79.)

The quotation emphasizes that the only way to achieve purification of the mind, overcome sorrow and lamentation, find relief from pain and grief, and attain self-understanding is through ‘Satipatthāna,’ also known as the ‘Four Foundations of Mindfulness.’ These foundations are Contemplation of the body, Contemplation of sensations, Contemplation of the mind, and Contemplation of mental objects. In the canon, they are referred to as Kāyānu Passanā, Vēdanānu Passanā, Chittanu Passanā, and Dhammānu Passanā.

Let’s delve into the first foundation, ‘Contemplation of the body,’ which involves six subsections for the meditator to contemplate the body within the body

1 Mindfulness of Breathing.

2 The Postures of the Body.

3 Mindfulness with clear comprehension.

4 Reflection on the Repulsiveness of the Body.

5 Reflection on the material Elements.

6 The nine cemetery contemplations.

“To meditate on the breath, it’s important to sit with a cross-legged posture, keeping the body erect and the hands resting on the lap with palms facing upward – the traditional meditation posture. However, if this is uncomfortable, any relaxed seated position can be adopted. The key is to stay still, alert but not tense, for an extended period” (Tranquility & Insight, Amadeo Sole-Leris. BPS, Kandy).

As per the original Pāli instructions, the focus of attention for breath awareness should be on the tip of the nose, as well as between the upper lip and just below the nostrils. This allows the meditator to easily perceive the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. It is mentioned, “Mindfully he breathes in, and mindfully he breathes out.”

Furthermore, the discourse reveals that the meditator delves deeply into the practice. “They are keenly aware of their breath, whether it is long or short, as they inhale and exhale. This focused awareness enhances their meditation experience.”

The second subsection explains “The four postures of the body,” from Ānāpānasati to Vipassanā. In our daily lives, we experience four postures: going, standing, sitting, and lying down. The book raises four questions about the posture of going or walking in the Vipassanā aspect:

1. “Who goes?”

2. “Whose going is it?”

3. “Why does the going take place?”

4. “Why is there going or walking?”

The answer to “Who goes?” is that no living being or person whatsoever goes. There is no being or person who goes, apart from the intention to go, the movements of the air element, and the consequent movements of the different parts of the body.

The answer to “Whose going is it?” is that it is not the going of any living being or person.

The reason for the going taking place is due to the diffusion of the air element, born

from mental activity.

Finally, there is going or walking because of the three factors: the mind, the air, and the movement of the different parts of the body caused by the movement of the air element.”

So, why not understand day-to-day life by practicing Vipassanā?



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